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ABSTRACT

Designed essentially for native paraprofessionals in order to meet a shortage of native teachers, a three-week on and five-week off-campus cycle program for Canadian Indian teacher education at the University of New Brunswick allows students to obtain degrees for teaching certification in four academic years and three summers. The participants (mainly women with families), who are employed in federal or provincial schools as teacher aides or education workers, travel from reserves to university for the on-campus cycle, and professors from regular teacher education departments of the universities travel to the reserves to conduct weekly tutorial classes during the five-week off-campus period. The program, funded by the Department of Indian Affairs and administered and supervised by university faculty, entitles all status Indians in the program to textbook, travel, and accommodation allowances from the Department. External evaluations, professional instruction, comparisons of students with those in other regular university programs, and rigid student teaching requirements maintain the same educational standards as those in the regular university programs. Results of the four-year-old program seem positive in terms of student social and intellectual growth, dropout rate, and student teaching performance. (JD)

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AN ON-CAMPUS, OFF-CAMPUS MODEL FOR NATIVE INDIAN TEACHER EDUCATION

by

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting

of the American Educational Research Association,

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Background

It is important to comment briefly on the recent context in which teacher education in general and Indian teacher education in particular has developed in Canada. Faculties of Education are creatures of the last 25 or 30 years when the movement from normal school to Faculty of Education commenced. The development started in major universities in Western Canada and moved slowly across the country from west to east. As teacher education entered the sphere of the universities, education faculties manifested highly conservative attitudes, endeavoring to reflect the values of the university community, i.e., becoming more academic than the academicians. Eventually education faculties recognized that their strength lay not in being similar to faculties of arts, but by being different from them.

As a result of this growing awareness of the fact that strength lay in difference, faculties of education in Canada moved into a variety of activities that were at first regarded as atypical, but which soon became something of a norm. These programs responded to the educational needs of special groups and amongst these groups the Indian teacher education programs became very significant.

The early 70's in Canada proved most opportune for these developments because a number of complementary forces came together. The National Indian Brotherhood chose to be responsible for the education of their own children (NIB, 1972); there was a declining need for teachers, and a desire on the behalf of teacher educators to become more involved with Canadian native people. There is no doubt that this was a happy juncture of events. There was a need, and there were facilities and personnel able to respond to these needs.

One may well ask why the needs of the native peoples were not responded to earlier. Curiously, in the Canadian context, an appropriate institution

was not obviously available to do the work. There are a range of other reasons. Unlike problems of urban education, the Indian population was scattered and many miles away from the universities. It should also be recognized that universities, because they are urban institutions, are populated by people with urban orientations. Insofar as the native Indian population is rural based, like the rest of rural Canada, they are ill-served by universities. But all this is changing because universities are being forced to develop a more pragmatic orientation to the society upon which they depend.

It may be useful to compare two kinds of programs with which universities have become associated. The Indian teacher education program and programs involving overseas development (in this comparison--teacher education programs). Overseas programs are a long way from the home university and problems--unless they are truly horrendous--must be resolved on site. Off-campus programs, but within national boundaries, pose different kinds of difficulties. The potential for a minor problem to find its way back to the university and become converted to a major issue is much greater in this latter case. And, of course, the political repercussions are potentially more hazardous because the political power base is so close to home.

Attitudes within university senates regarding Indian Teacher Education programs seem to be quite different from attitudes towards overseas programs. While the responsibility to participate in development overseas or at home is accepted by universities, there is no question that some university senates feel distinctly sympathetic toewards native Indian student programs. Members of university senates seem to recognize that they ought to have been more active in such programs much earlier. It is interesting to note, for example, that given the guarantee of quality programs, i.e., programs that

meet the normal academic standards of the university, it is possible to spend more time on reserves or in schools than in university--and this regardless of rules to the contrary. For example, one of our Indian teacher education programs is being offered entirely on the reserve for the first two academic years, and will follow an on-campus, off-campus model for the last two years (see below). Legalistic members of Senate would normally resist such changes but no question has been raised. Slowly there seems to be a realization that education and the environment are critically involved with each other and this concept is manifest in Indian teacher education programs. These ideas are now spreading slowly into other programs.

Administrators, of course, are concerned about the smooth development and organization of academic programs and also about spin-off ideas that can be used to develop new programs. The Indian Students Program at the University of New Brunswick was developed when the local Indian Education Consultant approached the Faculty in order to explore the possibility of program development. An assistant dean was placed in charge of the program and an advisory committee comprising members of the Indian community and members of the Faculty of Education was established.

Following the development of a proposal, the department responsible considered the matter and then the proposal was analyzed by a curriculum committee of the Faculty and forwarded to the senate. Getting the program through the Senate is usually the largest technical hurdle, but it is only the first step in getting the program into operation. Simultaneously, negotiations were undertaken with the Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs for funding, etc. All of this was handled by officers closest to the program. This pattern is basically similar to the development of all special programs including overseas work.

While our Indian teacher education program, which will be outlined below, is different from the traditional teacher education program, the quality of the work is analogous. Basically, the assurance that the work is of that quality rests on the instructors under the supervision of the chairman and to a lesser extent the supervision of the Dean. This assurance has been regularly confirmed by external evaluations which are also discussed below.

The Model

The Indian Students Program began in 1977 as a four-year pilot project to upgrade native paraprofessionals to become certified elementary teachers. Students spend a three-week period on the main university campus for intensive classes, after which they return home to their reserves for a five-week period. During this five-week off-campus period, faculty travel to the reserves throughout the province to conduct weekly tutorial classes. The three-week on- and five-week off-campus cycle is repeated four times in order for students to receive an equivalent amount of instructional time as the normal academic year. Students also spend full time on campus to attend the regular summer session of the university. By following this on- and off-campus format, students are thus able to complete the requirements for the B.Ed. degree in four academic years and three summers.

The UNB model is unique in Canada as it is the only one which allows students to obtain their degrees in four years through part-time study. It was designed in this way to accommodate the needs of the target group of students who were mainly women, with families, employed in federal or provincial schools as teacher aides or education workers. Thus students are able to uphold their family responsibilities and maintain their jobs by

taking leaves of absence for the on-campus period. A detailed description of the events that lead to the establishment of the program is beyond the scope of this paper but they may be obtained from Owston (1977).

Governance and Control

The Program Coordinator, who holds an academic appointment in the Faculty of Education, is responsible for all administrative aspects of the program and is responsible to the Chairman of the Curriculum and Instruction Division in the Faculty on academic matters.

General policy advice is given by an advisory committee made up of representatives from the Indian community, the university, and the Department of Indian Affairs. Also appointed on an annual basis to the Advisory Committee is a student representative and a program evaluator who is an ex officio member.

Access

While the program is designed essentially for native paraprofessionals, it is not restricted to them. Indeed, any native person who satisfies the regular university admissions requirements can be admitted. Those who have not completed high school (a large majority of the admissions are in this category), must be at least 21 years of age and be able to demonstrate some ability to handle university level work. Students admitted in this category are on probation for the first 36 credit hours of the program.

Since the program is funded on a cost recovery basis by the Department of Indian Affairs, students are not charged tuition fees. All status Indians in the program are entitled to textbook, travel, and accommodation allowances from the Department. Also, employed students are able to receive leaves of absence from their jobs at full salary. For these reasons, there are few,

if any, financial barriers preventing students from attending.

Standards

Any university program such as this which does not follow the traditional pattern is subject to criticism as being substandard or "watered down." The program designers were very much conscious of this fact, and hence, incorporated a number of features to avoid such criticism. These are discussed below.

Evaluation. An external evaluator is engaged each year to provide both formative and summative feedback to the Advisory Committee. In addition to gathering student ratings of the instructors and the program, the evaluator compares and contrasts the content and grading of the courses offered in the special program with those in the regular program. The evaluator also questions school principals where the students are employed and the cooperating teachers who supervise the students during their practice teaching to obtain their perceptions of the competence of the students. At the end of each year, a report is published and made available to any interested party (Loree, 1978, 1979, 1980).

Instruction. Because of the special schedule it is difficult to have regular faculty teach in the program, but this is done whenever possible. When faculty must be hired specially for the program, they must meet the same criteria required for those hired in the regular program. These measures, therefore, ensure a standard of instruction comparable to the regular program.

Student Comparisons. During the summer sessions, the Indian students are mixed in with the mainstream students in courses offered by the Faculty of Arts. This provides a basis for comparing achievement of the students in the special program with those in other regular university programs. Also after

the first year of the special program, a limited number of non-Indian students are permitted to register for individual courses in the special program. Besides providing another basis of comparison, this demonstrates that the courses are of equivalent standard to serve as prerequisites to subsequent courses in the regular program.

Student Teaching. The Indian students must complete the same student teaching requirements as those in the regular program. In order to have an independent evaluation of their competence, the Student Teaching Division assumes responsibility for the placement and supervision of all students. This is particularly important because the nature of the program is such that the academic instructors and students get to know each other very well, so that it becomes increasingly difficult for the instructors to evaluate the students objectively.

Acceptance

At the beginning there was some scepticism about the program, particularly on the part of other native people and several university administrators (Loree, 1978). This occurred despite the fact that the New Brunswick Department of Education considered the program equivalent to the regular program for teacher certification purposes and the program was approved through all the regular channels within the university. Four years later, most of the scepticism appears to have dissipated, although by no means has it entirely disappeared. From time to time, the odd unfavourable comment is heard from faculty members outside the program and from a few native people. The motive behind these comments often seems to be either "political" or resentment that the Indian students are getting "special treatment" not normally afforded to others.

Generally speaking, though, the program has been very well accepted by both the native and non-native communities. Furthermore, results of the program have been very positive in terms of student social and intellectual growth, dropout rate, and student teaching performance (Loree, 1978, 1979, 1980). For these reasons, last fall two new freshmen classes were admitted--another one at the main campus in Fredericton and one at a special extension facility at the Eskasoni Reserve near Sydney, Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia students will be able to take the first two years of the program at Eskasoni (following the same three week, five week model), however, they will have to attend the three week on-campus sessions in Fredericton during the final two years.

Conclusions

The University of New Brunswick model has much to recommend for it in terms of academic viability and not requiring major alterations in the students' lifestyles. It is not a panacea, however. Students do not get the same exposure to the intellectual and social life they would if they were attending an institution full time. Nor are they able to take the best advantage of recreational facilities or organizations, or of the libraries, laboratories, and other facilities. At this point, these sacrifices seem worthwhile to meet the acute shortage of native teachers.

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